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## THE ROUND TABLE

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### THE PITY OF IT

"We have our next debate Friday," announced my boy, twelve years old, moping in from school.

"Good! What is the question?"

"American ships should pay half-duties for passing through the Panama canal. Wish I wasn't in debating!"

Imagine it!

Here is a boy, not yet in the high school, who is expected to develop interest in debating and public speaking by wrestling with a question that would require severe work from college students.

Neither he nor any other youngster of his age can reasonably be expected to know, except in an extremely general way, the matters at issue in the dispute over the canal dues. They are, besides, matters that depend largely on principles of international law, the facts of recent treaty negotiation, and the like, that the boys can read up on only with excessive expenditure of time. Further, much of the matter they would read could scarcely be comprehensible to them; it presupposes too much.

No wonder that so many children learn to dislike school work. No one can do tasks that are beyond him, and develop interest in his work. In the name of common sense, let us give the children exercises, problems, tasks, subjects, that are fitted to their years. Then the fault is theirs if they do not learn and develop.

But the pity of killing the schoolboy's interest by laying out problems, even the nature of which he cannot comprehend! The folly of compelling boys to be vague, superficial, bombastic—of leading them to think that bold assertion is proof—of training them to depend on generalities and "bunk"!

Better one thing the pupil can do thoroughly than a cartload of pretentious exercises.

ROBERT W. NEAL

MASSACHUSETTS AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE  
AMHERST, MASS.

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*To the Editor of the "English Journal":*

I have read with great interest, great delight, in fact, the article in the January number of the *English Journal* on "Oral English in College." Those who have read the article will, no doubt, know that